
Meeting/workshop: March 12-13, 2010
Agenda item 12: Columbia River Summer Chinook Policy
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Background:

The Upper Columbia River summer/fall Chinook Evolutionarily Significant Unit (ESU) is one of the most robust and diverse groups of Chinook in the Columbia River. This ESU consists of populations or major spawning groups from the Hanford Reach area of the mainstem Columbia River upstream to Chief Joseph Dam and inclusive of tributaries from the Yakima River to the Okanogan River. This ESU represents one of the largest and most productive races of Chinook in the Washington State, and provides for fisheries from Alaska to the mainstem Columbia River to tributaries such as the Okanogan and into Canada. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) conducted a biological assessment and determined the ESU was not warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has classified most of the stocks within the ESU as healthy. The summer Chinook component of the ESU has earlier migration timing through the Columbia River than the fall Chinook component of the ESU. Most of the spawning occurs above Priest Rapids Dam and includes the mainstem Columbia River as well as major tributaries.

Summer Chinook enter the Columbia River in June and July on their migration to the upper Columbia River basin, above Priest Rapids Dam. Pre-hydropower development, the majority of the spawning occurred in the upper Columbia River above what is now Grand Coulee Dam. Access to over 500 miles of the upper Columbia River (excluding tributaries) was blocked by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam in 1941. Since completion of the Columbia River hydropower system, summer Chinook redds are found in the Columbia, Wenatchee, Okanogan, Methow, Similkameen, Chelan and Entiat rivers.

Artificial Production

The Department operates several artificial production facilities within the Upper Columbia River region that rear and release summer Chinook consistent with mitigation requirements associated with three public utility districts' hydropower projects within the region. Current facilities and release locations that are associated with summer Chinook production were constructed in the mid-1960s (Turtle Rock - mainstem), 1967 (Wells - mainstem), 1989 (Eastbank), and 1990 (Similkameen Pond, Dryden Pond, and Carlton Pond – all tributary releases within initial rearing occurring at Eastbank Hatchery). The mainstem releases are produced for harvest, whereas the tributary release programs use supplementation strategy with all, or a large portion of, wild fish in the broodstock. Total Department operated facility production is over four million; 1.5 million zero-age Chinook and 2.5 million yearling-age Chinook. Yearling age Chinook are all adipose fin-clipped and coded-wire tag (CWT) marked. Approximately one million zero aged Chinook are adipose fin-clipped and CWT marked.

Run Size

Population abundance has rebounded in recent years to levels that provide fish for harvest. During 1979-2000, the upper Columbia River summer Chinook adult returns were at low levels, but fairly stable, averaging 17,800 fish and ranging between 9,800 and 23,600. The return in 2001 increased significantly to 53,000 adults and again in 2002 to 89,500 upper Columbia summer Chinook adults returned to the Columbia River. During 2001 to 2009, the summer Chinook run has averaged 64,000 fish and ranged from 37,000 to 89,500.

Management Guidelines

Guidelines for managing fisheries and allocating harvest did not exist until very recently, since there has been virtually no harvest on summer Chinook from the 1960s until numbers rebounded in 2001. An escapement goal and treaty / non-treaty harvest sharing were negotiated in the *United States v Oregon* process and is included in the “2008-2017 *United States v Oregon Management Agreement for upriver Chinook, sockeye, steelhead, coho, and white sturgeon*” (MA). The management intent in that MA is to treat the hatchery and natural fish as one composite group because the fish are genetically similar, and the escapement goal is a combined goal for both. Consistent with current artificial production programs, the escapement goal is 29,000 fish at Bonneville Dam which is intended to provide 20,000 fish at Priest Rapids Dam. The management period was established as June 16 through July 31 at Bonneville Dam.

On June 5, 2007, the Department signed the “*Agreement between the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on Jointly managed salmon and steelhead populations*” (Agreement). This agreement provides guidelines for harvest sharing of salmon and steelhead stocks originating in areas above Wells Dam. The Agreement limits all non-treaty fishing on summer Chinook to minimal levels when the run size is below escapement needs. At levels of low allowable harvest (about 50,000 run size), harvest opportunity is allocated almost exclusively to upstream areas to meet Colville and Wanapum needs, as well as provide recreational fishing in the areas above Priest Rapids Dam, which otherwise have quite limited salmon angling opportunities.

The Department has also finalized the “Harvest Framework for Non-treaty Fisheries directed at Salmonids originating above Priest Rapids Dam” – a management plan that details management goals and harvest sharing for salmonids. The harvest measures for summer Chinook are compatible with the measures in the Colville Agreement.

Fisheries

Fisheries for summer Chinook have been re-initiated after several decades of closures providing additional opportunity for sport and commercial fisheries. Historic summer commercial seasons harvested summer Chinook, sockeye, summer steelhead and shad. Commercial seasons during 1909-1942 were open May 1 through August 25, with landings of summer Chinook averaging 40,000-50,000 fish annually. Prior to 2005, no summer Chinook season had occurred below Bonneville Dam since the two-day season allowed in 1964.

Fisheries in the upper Columbia (above Priest Rapids Dam) have occurred since 2000, but significant harvest did not begin until 2001. Below Priest Rapids Dam, sport fisheries reopened in 2002 with the majority of the catch and effort occurring below Bonneville Dam. Commercial fisheries did not begin in earnest until 2005.

Sport fisheries above Priest Rapids Dam have occurred regularly since 2000, starting about July 1, and continuing through about mid-October. There have been no restrictions on the fishery and no in-season emergency closures. Fisheries downstream of Priest Rapids Dam have operated under quotas based on the run size and available harvest.

Sport harvest above Priest Rapids Dam has averaged 3,800 between 2000 and 2009. Below Priest Rapids Dam sport harvest has averaged 2,600 between 2002 and 2009, and commercial harvest has averaged 2,500 between 2005 and 2009.

Steelhead Handle in Commercial Fishery

Steelhead impacts in winter, summer, and fall commercial fisheries are estimated based on historic steelhead to Chinook catch ratios observed during on-board monitoring and test fisheries. The states have gathered this information from different times of the year (spring, summer, fall), from gillnets with various mesh sizes (4 ¼, 4 ½, 5¼, 5½, 6, 8¼, 9, and 9¼ inches), and from different fishing zones. The information from all of these sources is used to estimate the number of steelhead that would be handled in any particular fishery. Between

2003 and 2007, the average number of steelhead mortalities in summer Chinook fisheries is estimated to be 62 hatchery fish and six wild fish. These data were provided to NMFS during ESA consultation.

Allocation of Allowable Harvest

The MA provides a table for treaty Indian/non-treaty sharing of available harvest. Once the escapement goal of 29,000 fish is achieved the harvest is shared 50/50 between the two fisheries. Within the non-treaty share of the harvestable fish, the first priority is for sport fisheries and Colville tribal fisheries above Priest Rapids Dam. These provisions are included in the agreement with the Colville Tribe and the Department's harvest framework plan. The allocation downstream of Priest Rapids Dam provided by the Commission in previous policies has been a 50/50 sharing between sport and commercial fisheries.

Summer Chinook Summits

The Department participated in four meetings in 2009 focusing on summer Chinook which were called Summer Chinook Summits (Summit). The purpose of the Summits was to review the current management framework and to determine the appropriate conservation, artificial production and harvest management objectives. The results of the Summits are summarized in a report that will be shared with other *United States v Oregon* members and the various constituent groups. The Summits were convened following completion of the Hatchery Scientific Review Groups (HSRG) recommendations for summer Chinook.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Department staff is recommending an extension of the current policy for one more year, without change. During the upcoming year, Department staff will share the results of the Summits with the *United States v Oregon* parties, co-managers in Oregon, sport fishing groups in the upper Columbia, and sport and commercial advisory groups in the lower Columbia. A new policy for effective January 1, 2011 would likely be based on changes to the management framework that result from the Summit process and subsequent public input, would provide harvest management objectives that include mark-selective fishery options and would revisit the allocation between commercial and recreational sectors.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Department staff is planning an extensive outreach program through spring and summer 2010 as part of the implementation process for the results of the Summit, which will likely result in recommended changes to the policy.

Action requested (identify the specific Commission decisions you are seeking):

Extend the policy C-3618 through December 31, 2010. The Director will work with the appropriate Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife representative to implement the provisions of the policy.

Draft motion language:

I move that the Commission adopt the following policy guidance relative to the mainstem Columbia River summer Chinook fishery:

The Policy C-3618 titled "Mainstem Columbia River Summer Chinook Allocation for Non-Indian Fisheries Below Priest Rapids Dam" effective through December 31, 2010, as presented by Department staff.

Justification for Commission action:

Provides direction to the Director for summer Chinook allocation in order for the Columbia River Compact to make decisions regarding recreational and commercial fisheries in concurrent waters.

Communications Plan:

Results of Commission decision will be shared with co-managers and appropriate constituents.

Form revised 10/16/2008 - sdy